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Model for Teaching Musical Discernment in the Christian Secondary School

Abstract

Recent technological advances in recording and reproducing music have greatly changed the way that members of this culture interact with music. With an ever-expanding wealth of recordings, students in Christian secondary schools are faced with an increasing number of musical choices and must be equipped to discern musical activity in a God-glorifying way. This study researches the factors influencing students' musical attitudes over which schools have the most control, describes a biblically-based Christian attitude towards music, and finally proposes a model based on that research for teaching musical discernment from a distinctly Christian standpoint. The proposed model includes the establishment of a required course in general music at the secondary level that both reflects how students currently interact with music and emphasizes critical analysis of musical excellence

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by

Zachary J. Vreeman

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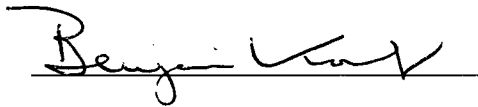
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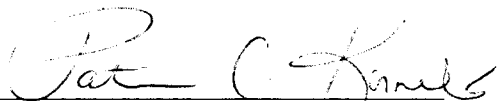
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Abstract

Recent technological advances in recording and reproducing music have greatly changed the way that members of this culture interact with music. With an ever-expanding wealth of recordings, students in Christian secondary schools are faced with an increasing number of musical choices and must be equipped to discern musical activity in a God-glorifying way. This study researches the factors influencing students' musical attitudes over which schools have the most control, describes a biblically-based Christian attitude towards music, and finally proposes a model based on that research for teaching musical discernment from a distinctly Christian standpoint. The proposed model includes the establishment of a required course in general music at the secondary level that both reflects how students currently interact with music and emphasizes critical analysis of musical excellence.

Introduction

The world of sound and the music people create with it has changed substantially and forever. Man's relationship with musical activity will never be as it was before the dawn of recording technology. This change in relationship has become only more pronounced in the last twenty years with computer and internet technology. In some ways education in music has not yet caught up with these changes. Centuries, even decades ago, the musical education of students was more immediately applicable to everyday life than it is today. Before recording technology was widely used, any music heard by anyone had to be performed live, and teaching generations of students the art of performance was necessary to fill their lives with the richness of music. In the era of instant access to volumes of recorded music and the presence of it in every corner of life, there has been a recognizable shift in the ways that people daily interact with music. Today's people are hearers of the ubiquitous background music of public places, collectors of electronic recordings both audio and video, consumers of television and film, and listeners of music even in the truncated form of cell phone "ringtones." Modern culture's interaction with music has changed dramatically, so it is valuable for Christian educators to pause and examine how the curriculum matches the world in which our students operate. Of the greatest importance is how well students are being prepared to respond to the world of sound in a God-glorifying way.

While previous generations experienced music primarily in a communal way through concert performances and community gatherings, recordings have given us much more opportunity to interact with music individually. For students, this individualism has profoundly changed the role of music in each of their lives. Personal musical preferences define peer groups and there is pressure for each student to claim favorite artists and musical

styles. Adolescents are voracious consumers of music, and new technologies only encourage more consumption. Personal music devices boast the ability to hold enough music for multiple *years* of continuous play. Music is increasingly portable, duplicable, and transferable. Additionally, music is heard everywhere, for a plethora of uses and roles. It is used to both encourage thought and to drown it, to focus and to distract. There is now little in life that is done without music, and its ease of duplication and retrieval has led to widespread indiscriminate use of this precious human craft. Caution and stewardship in this area has never been more necessary as the culture encourages blind consumption over thoughtful discrimination.

The field of music education has not yet fully reacted to this cultural shift in musical activity. While the number of choices students make as consumers of music continues to increase, music curriculum has remained primarily, if not increasingly performance based. Musical performance will always remain indispensable to any music curriculum, but the amount of discernment students will practice throughout their lives requires a reevaluation of how current practices educate to that end. Does the performance-only model of most secondary music programs adequately prepare students for their musical lives as discerning music consumers, or does the situation warrant a change in practice? If performance ensembles are indeed inadequate, then students are left with little guidance about what they are to discern and how they will do so.

For the Christian school, the issue of musical discernment is of even greater importance. Equipping students for lives of Christian service involves training them how to discern God's will for all areas of life, spiritual and physical. Music programs in Christian schools, then, cannot ignore the task of informing the musical choices of students inside and

outside of school. Christian school graduates should be capable of discerning goodness in music, both in the music itself and how it interacts with other aspects of life. Postmodern culture has already stated its opinion on discernment by allowing the idea of “goodness” to be entirely individual, especially in the area of aesthetics. In contrast, Christian philosophy recognizes that God exists and does have objective opinions about truth, morality, and beauty. The Christian student is responsible for a much greater standard than his or her own preference, and needs to be given the tools necessary to live in this modern, hyper-musical world.

Given the current format of our Christian school music programs, specifically at the secondary level, it is unlikely that this new challenge is being dealt with fully. At that crucial upper level, the majority of Christian school music programs exist only in the form of performance ensembles. While this format gives great opportunity for students to interact with music in many powerful ways, it is a difficult environment to address music from a philosophical or theological perspective. Most discussions of musical merit go on within the director’s head and are reflected in repertoire choices. Overall, students are not being directed in how to make musical choices themselves that are applicable to their lives beyond school. What develops is a great divide between a concept of “in-school” and “outside-school” musical activity. If students receive no direct instruction on a biblical attitude towards music, the message they hear is that either the musical discernment they practice outside of school is none of the teacher’s business or that it is of no interest to school. When schools do show interest in musical choices, it is often through a legalistic edict endorsing only “Christian music,” a rule that often deepens the divide between the concepts of in- and out-of-school musical activity. Instead, the goal of the Christian high school should be to

enable students both to choose excellent music and recognize their Christian task regarding its uses.

This study reviews research relevant to teaching discernment in Christian secondary schools and proposes program adaptations based on that research, thus aiding schools to achieve success in training all students to respond to music in a biblically faithful way.

Research Model

The research follows two primary strains: first, in empirical research related to musical preference and attitude formation; and second, in writings of Christian theologians, philosophers, and musicians about man's relationship to the arts and music. The research into musical preferences suggests that the formation of such attitudes and preferences is a complex issue, and that there are specific factors over which schools have the most influence. A summary of Christian writings on the topic suggests a set of skills and principles that form the learning objectives of musical discernment education. Without clear objectives for student learning, illuminating the areas of greatest influence is of little value.

The practical model suggested for Christian schools is a synthesis of these two areas of research. The research suggests that current school structures are largely inadequate for this task and that more music instructional time be spent on topics directly related to discernment. Because this type of instruction typically falls under the category of "general music," additional research into general music practices at the secondary level is consulted to aid in the development of the program recommendations. Some recommendations transcend the music classroom alone and are offered for the school as a whole.

The task of instructing students to be competent musical discerners in daily life is not one to be taken lightly. It is also a topic that the prevailing philosophy of relativism in our

culture finds inappropriate. Due to the universality of music, this is a prime area for Christian schools to proclaim truth. Allowing the great divide between in- and out-of-school musical activity to exist in the minds of students is certainly the easier path. However, if Christian secondary schools take steps to fulfill this ever-growing need for discernment, students will be able to please God in their daily lives, standing for His truth in music.

Definition of Terms

Before attempting to describe discernment education and the issues inherent in that discussion, it is necessary to define certain terms that will be used throughout the study. When dealing with a topic directly related to emotions and feelings, words can easily develop meanings that differ from person to person much like musical taste. The following definitions are provided to alleviate confusion, and are my own unless otherwise noted.

Aesthetics – The specific field of philosophy that deals with questions of beauty.

Aesthetic dimension – The qualities of objects pertaining to their beauty.

Aesthetic education – Those curricular disciplines in which beauty is studied most specifically, namely music, dance, visual arts, drama, and literature.

Attitude – Related to discernment, attitude is an organized network of beliefs, values, and experiences that dynamically affect an individual's response and perception to all objects and situations (Cutietta, 1992). This study is concerned primarily with a student's beliefs, values, and experiences that influence their response to music in general and specifically.

Discernment – The “the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure.” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Discerning is a cognitive activity that separates good from bad, or determining what is true and excellent. Musical discernment, more

specifically, refers to the act of determining truth and goodness in human musical activity, both in evaluating individual musical artifacts for their quality and discerning excellence in the uses of and personal involvement in music also.

Hearing - perceiving sound (and therefore music) as background or otherwise out of the hearer's primary attention.

Listening – The activity of focusing attention and cognitive energy on a sound object (or music) while other senses assume a background role.

Preference – More specific than attitude, preference refers to a specific choice of one thing over another. Though related, attitudes and preferences differ in one profound way. To have an attitude towards an object, some prior knowledge or experience is required. Therefore, preferences can be informed by an attitude, but an attitude is not necessary for a preference to exist.

Taste – Often used synonymously with preference and attitude, taste has the additional connotation of a standard for it existing outside of the individual. “Good taste” and “bad taste” involves the evaluation of the quality of one's attitudes and preferences.

Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction

A study of best methods for teaching musical discernment from a Christian perspective is on its own rather fruitless, as there is little research to draw on that has studied the topic that specifically. Empirical research in the realm of Christian schooling is extremely limited, and for music education even more so.

Desiring that students be able to discern between good and bad in the area of music and develop a Christian musical taste creates problems due to the lack of a unified philosophy guiding all educational research. Many studies that address musical attitudes and preferences do so with no claims of what attitudes might be superior to others, but rather seek only to describe how those attitudes are formed in the person. For this reason, this study summarizes what research has to say about how a student's musical taste is influenced in schooling. This information will help form the proposed model for teaching musical discernment, as methods and structures are derived from what research says are the most potent influences held by the school. In short, research into musical preferences supplies much of the "how" in the proposed model.

Researchers tend to ignore truth claims in their studies with regard to which attitudes about music are desired, while the purposes of this document are to outline distinctly Christian musical attitudes. The standards for how students should discern varies widely among people with differing worldviews and philosophies of education, so the second strain of research is a summary of literature regarding Christian aesthetics. This will supply the "what" of a curriculum in musical discernment.

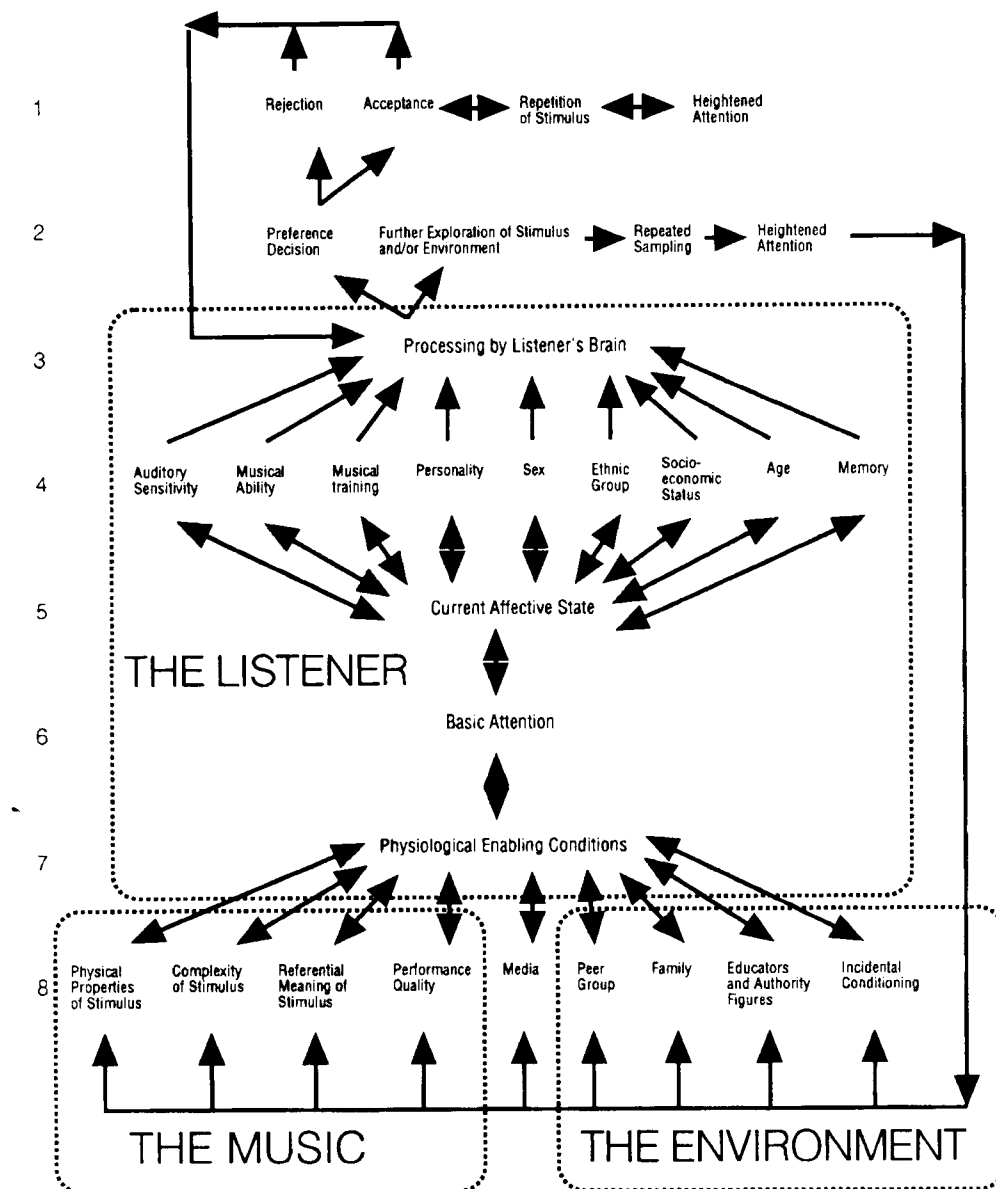
Literature related to musical taste formation

Study into attitudes, preferences, and taste has been largely documented by researchers whose primary interest is in the psychological aspects of it. Due to this, much, though not all, of the research attempts to pinpoint specific psychological influences to musical preference rather than testing the efficacy of particular teaching methods. Still, a great deal has been learned about the influences on a student's musical taste on which pedagogy can be built.

Overall, one of the most important researchers in the area is Albert LeBlanc (1980), whose work throughout the 1980s is quite valuable, particularly his "Model of the Sources of Variation in Music Preference" (fig. 1), which has been used by himself and other researchers to account for all influences on the listener that affect preference (Cutietta, 1992). By isolating these factors, LeBlanc and others have been able to describe music preference (or taste) formation more accurately. The model recognizes physical, cultural, environmental, and musical factors as having influence, with music education impacting the listener's taste on multiple levels of LeBlanc's hierarchy (Droe, 2006). It is worth noting that though LeBlanc used the word "preference" in the title of his model, he used the word "taste" in the title of his study that includes the same model (1980). In this he recognizes the relationship of preferences to specific objects and taste as a more general concept that is related to preferences. This section of the literature review is so titled to recognize that the aim of this study is not to instill a specific set of musical preferences in students, but rather to help them form a musical taste that provides a framework for preferring excellence in music. The distinction is slight, but important.

Fig. 1

Model of the Sources of Variation in Music Preference, Albert LeBlanc (1980)



LeBlanc's model identifies three broad areas affecting a listener's preference, arranged into a hierarchy with which listeners make decisions about specific musical objects. The first is a collection of characteristics of the music itself, the second those of the environment (cultural, not physical) in which the listener encounters the music, and the third

is a grouping of both static and dynamic characteristics of the listener. Even with this comprehensive model, studying attitudes and preferences about music remains a very difficult task, as isolating any one factor is nearly impossible.

The Music. A number of studies have looked at specific musical factors that influence preference. Teachers have enormous influence over these factors of the music itself as they plan their teaching. Included in LeBlanc's model were the physical properties, complexity, referential meaning, and performance quality of the music. In studying these characteristics of the music itself, the factors that have shown the greatest effect are tempo of, familiarity with, and complexity of the musical examples used.

Of the physical properties in music, one of the most significant influences on preference is the tempo of an excerpt (Getz, 1966; LeBlanc, 1981). Adolescents prefer moderately fast to fast tempi in listening examples. This is particularly useful information when planning encounters with unfamiliar musical styles or instrumentations, as choosing an excerpt with a slightly higher tempo may help students focus on and enjoy the music. Additionally, these studies show that musical examples are more readily preferred by students if the melodies and structures of the pieces are relatively clear-cut.

Different types of familiarity with musical excerpts have also been studied. The original intent of Getz (1966) was to quantify the relationship between repeated listening and preference. He found that there was a statistically significant relationship between increased preference and repeated hearings. Getz proposed six to eight hearings of a composition over the course of a semester to be an optimum exposure. Most additional research has supported the correlation of repetition to preference, but the relationship between complexity of music and familiarity is even more instructive. Finnäs (1989) extended Getz's study of repeated

listenings and found the correlation to be true of music that was complex, but that repetition actually decreased preferences when the excerpt was simple or trite.

This issue of complexity is the basis for another model for preference study proposed by Walker (1980), known as the “hedgehog” theory (Droe, 2006). Walker claimed that individuals possess a preference for their optimum complexity. As a hedgehog curls up and withdraws when over stimulated, music encountered that is too far from optimum complexity will cause the listener to ignore it, and thus have a low preference. This relates to familiarity in the fact that music that is encountered that is more complex than the optimum point will be more greatly enjoyed with repetition. Elevating a listener’s taste, then, is a careful process of choosing excerpts that are incrementally beyond the listener’s optimum complexity, and then repeating the listening a precise amount of times until the level of familiarity and optimum complexity meet to produce the greatest preference (Droe, 2006).

Even though Walker’s view of an aesthetic experience is far too insipid, viewing the individual with little emotion or personality, the model can still be instructive to teaching. Exposure to unfamiliar pieces and styles in the classroom can be given the greatest chance to succeed if attention is paid to the present listening abilities of the students. Great pieces of music may go unappreciated and thus “un-liked” if presented at the inappropriate time. Once appropriate excerpts have been chosen, research supports a far greater amount of repetition in listening activities than is normally practiced in the music classroom.

While many studies have addressed music from a listening perspective, some have looked at how familiarity gained through performing and rehearsing are related to preference. The rehearsal and performing process has been shown to greatly increase preference, even with music that is quite difficult (Siebenaler, 1999; Silvey, 2005). Students also show a

preference for music that is performed well and expressive, a tendency that only increases with age (Stamer, 2006; Teachout, 1993). Surprisingly, middle school band members in a study by Teachout (1993) cited far more musical reasons for their performance preferences than any other type of social or cultural reasons. As students become more educated in music, the greater their preferences depend on the strictly musical aspects of each experience.

If teachers are to guide the formation of their students' musical taste, the task of choosing music for performing and listening must be a careful process. Research indicates that elevated tempi can help introduce students to unfamiliar styles, and that music used for listening must be as excellent as possible. Also, presenting far more than single hearings of appropriately complex music is a good strategy for ensuring students appreciate the musical examples as much as possible.

The Environment. There are certainly more factors than those within the music that influence taste. Because music partners frequently with many other facets of life, the cultural environment that surrounds each student has a powerful influence on his or her musical taste. According to Radocy and Boyle (2003), social influences are always a factor in musical preference. While this is not a surprising conclusion, it has been difficult to quantify the effects that different peer groups have on student music choices.

Alpert's study (1982) of the effect of disc jockey, peer, and music teacher approval on music selection yielded mixed results. Music teacher and disc jockey approval of the classical excerpts modestly increased preference, and peer approval decreased it. For the other genres studied (country and rock), no significant effect was found. Similarly, a study by Pantle (1982) with college students showed little effect from the approval of authority figures to specific musical examples. These studies lack some validity, though, as attempts

to minimize other experiences often led to extremely artificial study situations. A recorded voice on a tape that only purports to be an authority expressing an opinion is far less effective than a person with whom the subject actually has a relationship.

Of greater significance are a group of studies which allowed conversation and the observing of other's actions to influence opinions. Patterned after studies by Asch (1951), Furman and Duke (1988) found that music majors were far less likely to be swayed by the musical opinions of others than were non-majors. Those with more musical experience were far more confident in their stated opinions and were not as easily affected by the "confederates" in the study who gave unanimous opinions. This research indicates that those who are more musically educated feel less pressure in their musical lives to appeal to or seek approval from a peer group.

Social influence on student preference is most talked about in the music education community with respect to recruiting. By choosing to be in music classes, students show a preference for music, if not in specific choices, at least in involvement. Madsen and Kuhn (1994) categorized many reasons that students gave for their participation in music. They indicate that the social contexts play a significant role in the selection of music courses, and often function as the "real" reasons why students participate (Droe, 2006). While this may be true, still other research has shown that social influence does not extend as heavily into the class itself as it does getting students in the door. Teachout (1993) studied stated reasons of middle school students for selecting favorite pieces, and found that the inherent musical characteristics of pieces far outweighed social reasons for selecting favorites.

The social factor on which teachers have the most direct control is modeling, and that has proven quite influential on student preferences. Even when the model is inappropriate,

the modeled behavior has been shown to be quite powerful, as in Baker's work with elementary students (1980). Using lullabies and sea chanties, he taught each to different groups of children using both appropriate and inappropriate tempos. Children had a strong tendency to prefer the performance that was modeled to them rather than what would be musically correct. This shows students paying close attention to what the teachers have to say musically, and that they do influence the eventual musical choices of the students.

A second avenue of modeled behavior is the stated approval and disapproval of teachers. As authority figures, teachers have for many years used positive and negative examples to illustrate concepts and to model choices (Droe, 2006). In the area of music listening, studies about the effects of teacher approval have had mixed results. Pantle (1982) was mentioned earlier as one such study. In his literature review of music preference research (2006), Droe mentioned two studies in which the influence of teacher approval was shown to have significant results in the student's listening behavior. Both studies showed an increase in listening time to the music that was taught and approved (Dorow, 1977; Greer, R. D., Dorow, L. G., Wachhaus, G., & White, E. R., 1973). One limitation of these studies is the lack of data concerning the subjects' opinion towards the music. The only data collected was that of listening time, with no exploration of whether or not the subjects had a greater preference toward the taught music. Approval may have simply piqued interest or curiosity, and this accounted for the increased listening time, while preferences may have not changed. This is a subtle distinction, as listening time may indicate value in the music, but it is important if the desire is for students to form a particular musical taste.

The desire for an objective idea of musical taste is not a universal belief. Many teachers merely want their students to "love music" with little mention of the specifics

(Cutietta, 1992). A strong influence in culture today is a sociological view of music, which suggests that a particular musical artifact only has value in how it is perceived in aggregate quantities of a society. There is nothing intrinsic in the music that is the key to its quality. Thankfully, this is not a widely held belief among music educators, but it is a powerful mindset from society at large that counts as a significant social influence on students (Hoffer, 1992).

The Listener. Outside sources of influence have been shown to have great effect on the musical attitudes and preferences of students, but LeBlanc's model shows a number of personal sources of influence, among them musical ability and training, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and age. Some researchers have expressed dismay at the fact that due to the complexity of music education, research is hardly unified. Even many items in the list of listener influences have individual nuance, so the collection of research is largely descriptive and eclectic. Because of this, it is at times difficult to draw specific conclusions from the research (Runfola & Rutkowski, 1992).

The largest influence was briefly mentioned earlier, that of more musical training being effective for minimizing peer influences. Fortunately for music educators, this is the influence on the student over which they have the most control. Though music is often a communal activity, music educators do wish for their students to become individually competent, as is the goal of this present study. Therefore, the work of Furman and Duke (1988) should be heartening, as it shows more musically trained students better able to free themselves from external pressures regarding their preferences.

Since many of the skills required for musical taste are those of listening, it is worth noting that students with more musical training have also shown greater ability to distinguish

pitch (Walker, 1987) and rhythm patterns (Geringer & Madsen, 1984). The greatest amount of research into listening skills was performed in the 1960s and 70s, when general music at the junior high level was still quite high (Haack, 1992).

Qualitative research has also shown greater independence through training. In a recent study of students' perceptions of the choral contest experience, sophomore singers saw the music contest experience as a great motivating, team-building tool, and the rating as highly motivating itself. More experienced singers evaluated the experience with a greater focus on the musical outcomes, and tended to view the rating as far less valuable than their own opinion of the performance (Stamer, 2006). A recent qualitative study of choral singers also showed more perceptive music evaluation with more experience. The study chronicled the statements of singers throughout the rehearsal process of *Rejoice in the Lamb*, by Benjamin Britten (Silvey, 2005). More training led the students to more appreciation and greater ability to discuss the merits of the work.

Other factors cited by LeBlanc that are not directly controlled by the listener are gender and ethnicity. Both factors have been shown to possess great influence over musical preference, but many of the reasons are social rather than biological (Droe, 2006). Some of those musical preference choices which are heavily biased, such as instrument selection, have little bearing on music evaluation but perhaps have the most influence on the starting points that educators face with regards to discernment. Students do come to school with a musical background that their education will seek to broaden. This area of influence, though often studied with gender and ethnicity in mind, in actuality describes social influences.

Musical aptitude is often cited as a great influence, especially by listeners who feel they have little. A common misunderstanding in this area is the idea that there are "musical"

and “unmusical” people, with little gray area in between. Often this distinction is better described as one of training rather than aptitude, as trained and untrained adults are highly responsive to musical structures (Cuddy & Upitis, 1992). Increased exposure and training can equip students of all aptitudes with the vocabulary and theory necessary to harness these listening skills.

Lastly, concerning the individual, David Hargreaves of England has over the past two decades researched the attitudes of British schoolchildren towards musical study. Over this time, he has found that students have deeply held musical identities, and that those identities are formed primarily outside of school (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003). While nearly all students are involved in music outside of school, only seven percent choose to study by the end of their schooling. In one survey of outside-of-school activity he found that nearly all students listened to music regularly, half spent time creating it, and eighty percent had access to musical instruments at home. Though many of them reported enjoying music as a subject in school, there were many reasons given for leaving music in secondary school. Among those reasons were a view of music as highly specialized, non-viable group sizes, and the replacement of school music with other musical activities outside of school. Hargreaves’ research illustrates a sad trend in England that is not too unexpected. Students are choosing to form their musical identities out of school as they find its study either less applicable to their lives or less worthy of scholastic study.

Summary. Musical attitudes and preferences are quite complex, and the efforts to study their formation have shown some practical insight on how they can be influenced most effectively. The research suggests that emphasis on more musical training, familiarity with musical styles and specific pieces, good modeling by authority figures, and careful selection

of music are the most critical areas to address musical taste. Good musical discernment from a Christian perspective is akin to development of a specifically Christian musical taste.

There are, however, limitations to the research. Due to the complexity of the subject, research on taste formation has been largely eclectic and primarily describes the influences without drawing many universal conclusions. Most notably absent is research that targets the ways to develop particular musical tastes in students. As much of the research in this area is done by psychologists rather than educators, this is not surprising.

This information is still valuable to teachers, and gives insight into best methods for influencing preference. However, Christian discernment is a far more encompassing idea than a set of preferences, and will necessitate changes more foundational than just teaching methods.

Literature Related to Christian Aesthetics

In order to propose a model for teaching musical discernment, it is necessary to define the criteria for making musical decisions. For this study, those criteria become the “what” of the curriculum. Without a clear idea of the desired outcomes of good musical discernment, an education in it would be useless. Thus, a review of what comprises a Christian aesthetic philosophy is imperative.

Aesthetics is a field of philosophy that, like others, defies consensus. Even in the area of Christian philosophies regarding music, there are great differences between viewpoints. This study addresses the issue of Christian musical discernment from a Reformed perspective. This view sees music as a valuable human craft, an avenue for God-glorifying service, and an aspect of earthly life in need of redemptive work now. Each graduate of a Christian

secondary school should be able to describe their relationship to the area of music, and more specifically, discern biblically faithful and unfaithful musical activity.

A study of the literature revealed four primary perspectives essential to this philosophical foundation of Christian discernment: recognition of aesthetic excellence as an objective reality, an integrated view of the aesthetic dimension in creation, the view of artist as craftsman, and clarity about the daily task of each Christian to pursue excellence in music.

The Objective Nature of Aesthetics. Is seeking to define standards for Christian musical involvement an appropriate endeavor? The idea of objectivity in aesthetics is explosive to many people. In our culture, a spirit of relativism has come to rule the realm of beauty, and represents a dramatic shift in thinking that has not always been. The common phrase “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” so often stated, must be recognized for the blatant relativism that it celebrates. Even Christians, who unabashedly recognize God as the source of truth, often share this idea of subjective beauty, and its results are destructive. Claiming absolute truth in aesthetics is imperative to any curriculum teaching musical discernment.

Does God have opinions about aesthetics? Scripture does give insight into this question, as examples of God valuing artistic endeavor abound. Already in Genesis, God is seen uniquely gifting Jubal with musical talents, while giving his brothers the tasks of herdsman and metal worker (Gen. 4:19-22). In this God clearly shows that He values music as a vocation even amongst other more “economical” pursuits. There are numerous examples of God commanding the Israelites to do things purely for the sake of beauty, as in the command to have skilled artisans fashion priestly garments for Aaron:

Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests-Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. (Exodus 28:1-3 NASB)

God's instructions to build His tabernacle also called on the work of skilled artists to create a beautiful space with significant ornamentation (Exodus 25-27). God does not show Himself to be a twenty-first century industrialized pragmatist, but rather a God who prefers constructions and activities that are beautiful rather than utilitarian. Calvin Seeveld (2008) articulately illuminates God's celebrating of artistry not only in works of art, but also in daily tasks:

Once upon a time God raised up the choreographer Miriam and the song-writer Moses to dance about the victory of the Lord against the evil-minded Egyptians (Exodus 15:1-21). Simply to issue a bare-faced communiqué to the wire services – “Egyptian army drowned” – would have been inadequate. The Lord wanted people to move their bodies rhythmically with an exuberant happiness. (p.1)

The spirit of pragmatism does not recognize art for the sake of beauty as a worthwhile activity. This tension was best shown in Jesus' rebuke of Judas (Matthew 26:6-13). In a truly beautiful act of performance art, the woman honored Jesus, and even though her actions were impractical, Jesus celebrated them. Many in this culture would agree with Judas, that her “waste” of expensive perfume and its container was wrong. Jesus response was instead, “She has done a beautiful thing to me” (Matthew 26:10b NIV).

However, objective standards for art are not the norm, even in Christian circles. Dr. John Mark Reynolds, who speaks on this topic frequently to Christian secondary and college students, is met with great resistance. He found that while Christian students generally accept the existence of objectivity in morality, his assertion of the same truth in the area of art and music is met with eye-rolling: “But beauty? Beauty was something they choose. It makes them mad to imagine losing this freedom in just the same way their secular peers are angered at the thought of losing moral autonomy.” (section 2, ¶ 6). Karen De Mol echoes this thought, saying that some question the pursuit of musical quality at all, with individual taste ruling supreme (2004). People arguing for this perspective view any claim of absolute standards to be elitist and snobby, and would gladly sacrifice musical quality for the feelings of the performers.

This ingrained relativism in students is reflected in a wide variety of artistic choices, including music, literature, and especially dress. Reynolds (2008) notes the stark contrast between his and his grandmother’s generation on the issues of literature and dress. Only decades ago, literature in education was chosen “not to relate to the student, but to elevate the taste of the reader” (section 1, ¶ 30). Giving students a clear idea of aesthetic excellence in literature was important, and students widely accepted that purpose. Similarly, the area of dress has become not an issue of aesthetics but only that of modesty. Schools tolerate aesthetically ugly clothing, as long as it fits the idea of “modest.” The act of clothing oneself then ceases to be an issue of beauty, and is only an issue of not causing your neighbor to stumble. If this is the only message that students receive regarding clothing, then they see dress as a subjective art, so long as they do not offend anyone (Reynolds, 2008). School rules regarding music are often similarly an issue of modesty rather than quality, as students

are encouraged to keep their preferences regarding music at home, with little discussion of the actual content.

So modesty in music, rather than discernment, is another message that students often receive. Their personal choices are allowed to rule supreme as long as they do not offend others. This is dangerous. Reynolds remarks on his realization of the danger of wallowing in aesthetic relativism:

Morality is real and so moral mistakes damage men's souls. If beauty is real, then mistakes would be also very serious. If my favorite music, art, and entertainment are ugly, and ugliness is not just an opinion, then my entertainment might be killing my soul. (*What My Nana Taught Me*, section 2, ¶ 2)

If individual choice is the ultimate authority on musical quality, then music has no real value in itself. A Christian school cannot allow the idea of subjectivity to be the message students receive regarding musical discernment without ignoring truth revealed in creation and scripture (Reynolds, 2007).

Rules promoting modesty in schools are not without support, though. In Romans 14 Paul makes it clear that we are not to allow our choices to become stumbling blocks to others whose faith is weaker, and young students are certainly weak yet in their faith. For this reason, restrictive rules are necessary as children grow in faith. Alternatively, some attempt to extract lines from this chapter, such as "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind," and "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:5,13, NIV) to make an argument for relativism. Those that do miss the point of the chapter, because all of Paul's examples involve the weaker party imposing more restrictive rules on themselves, rather than less. In all cases, Paul makes the case of erring on the side of caution, so that the

weaker are not caused to stumble. For music, this chapter encourages Christians to build each other up with their musical choices, while always desiring greater strength in their faith. Strong faith in matters of art requires more education and wrestling with the issue. Romans 14 is not an argument for relativism, where moral rightness in musical choice lies at the feet of the individual. It is a caution to the strong to not cause the weak to stumble as a matter of service to the weak while they are weak. Schools should desire that students grow in their faith, and in this case their understanding of musical task, but do so carefully.

But what does scripture say of the objective standards specifically? The lack of direct, unequivocal standards for music-making is one reason why relativism is so tempting. Foundations of understanding artistic activity are clearly displayed, yet specifics of making and choosing music are not. Similarly, the Bible does not instruct architects and engineers on the best types of materials for constructing a particular type of bridge. Discernment in both instances comes from a combination of truths discovered in scripture and truths gleaned from what man has discovered about creation (De Mol, 1999). With the understanding that truth in aesthetics exist, the study continues with a description of the integrality of music in creation and a description of man's daily task in musical discernment.

Music's Integral Relationship with the Whole of Creation. The hallmark differences between a Christian philosophy of music and that of modern culture is well-outlined by a number of authors. Chief among them are the view that music, and all arts, are permanently embedded in all of life, that artists have a duty to their neighbor in their work, and that art is a craft rather than special revelation.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his treatise on Christian aesthetics entitled *Art in Action* (1980), spoke strongly against the elitism given to "high art," and to the idea that art is only

for contemplation. He cites the recent trend in our Western culture to take all objects that are to be thought of artistically and in essence box them up. This is a common view of the culture reflected in the building of museums and concert halls, as if all artistic contemplation is restricted to what goes on within the walls of such establishment. This not only encapsulates objects that were not originally purposed for aesthetic contemplation, but also allows society to not have to think critically about art as a whole. This thought is clearly at odds with the true interrelated nature of creation. Aesthetic qualities are inherent in all objects, the sum total of these qualities being the objects' character. All pieces of life, then, call out for more aesthetic richness, not only pieces of high art. The view that leaves aesthetics only to that narrow slice of life misses the point, as the aesthetic excellence is a valid measure of any object. Wolterstorff recognizes this as true for all of man's earthly crafts, even those that are not meant specifically for contemplation, saying that

There is no such thing as a *good* artifact—a good shovel, a good wheelbarrow, a good house—which is aesthetically poor.... If an artifact occupies a significant place in our perceptual field, then, it is a better artifact if it is an aesthetically better artifact. (*Art in Action*, p.170)

The presence of objects that are specifically for aesthetic contemplation does not mean that it is inappropriate to evaluate the aesthetic quality of objects not meant for that purpose. Calvin Seerveld referred to artistry as “God’s clothing for human life” (*The Gift of Artistry* (2008), p1) and confirms Wolterstorff’s claim that God desires aesthetic quality in every object and activity.

For the school, this gives reason to teach students towards artistic thinking in all areas of life. Music should not be seen as a divided piece of life only meant for contemplation, but

as an aspect of life that partners with many others. This integrated view of curricular areas is far more true to the reality of creation, and suggests that music plays a more vital role in the curriculum. Students who choose not to enroll in a music course do not actually have lives infused with less need for aesthetic excellence, they are only less equipped to create with that in mind. Striving for aesthetic excellence in daily life is not a task only for the man or woman with art as vocation, but for all who will in their lives create anything.

The Artist as Craftsman. Secondly, the task of artist and the nature of art-making have been confused in modern culture and must be addressed from a Christian standpoint. Calvin Seerveld (2006) spoke against the idea of the artist's task being somehow elevated and inspired, saying "No one thing has ruined art so much in Western civilization as the cumulative nonsense about the artist as supra-rational genius." (section 2, para.1). Art (and music, specifically) is human craft and is developed continually, and the artist who waits for some sort of inspiration to deliver art to him is doomed to fail as this view is isolationist (Seerveld, 1999). For this reason, Seerveld spelled creativity 'd-i-s-c-i-p-l-i-n-e,' and said that artists must be masters of their discipline's history. Wolterstorff echoed the idea of artist as craftsman as he talked of the bygone days when the most profound art was being produced by "the tribe" (1980). When artistry was widely considered a trade rather than special gift, art was wedded to life more seamlessly with significant amounts of artistic study being the norm. At that time, the world was primarily free of an elitist "high art" culture and its isolationist, anti-establishment artists. The ignorance and rejection of the rich art tradition by artists has encouraged the alienation of art from the lives of common people (Seerveld, 2000).

The effects of music being considered special gift rather than disciplined craft can be seen throughout secondary schooling. Excellence in music is left mainly to the "naturals"

who have special talents. In this view, the unskilled get a pass and are not expected to even attempt the discipline that artistry requires. Hargreaves and Marshall (2003) noted the view of music as a highly specialized field as a frequently cited reason for secondary students to opt out of music classes.

Before the artist can be seen as craftsman, students must also have an appropriate understanding of the nature of music itself. The emotional nature of music and its prominent place in worship often leads to misunderstanding about its existence. Music is a human activity, not a special revelation of God. The oft-heard phrase “God’s gift of music” is out of sync with reality, not recognizing the fact that a piece of music is fashioned by man with raw materials that God created (De Mol, 1999). Inferring that God was the actual composer of a piece of music distorts reality. Because works of music are not special revelation, it is unnecessary for a Christian musician to wait around for “inspiration” or “creativity” (Seerveld, 1999). Seerveld (1999) said, “Doing art is a certain kind of job: you don’t have to be ‘creative’ (p.1).

Lastly, the musician always has a duty to serve his neighbor by crafting the most excellent music he can, and fitting that music with its many purposes. The task of making music for neighbors can be compared to the act of a dietician caring for his neighbor’s nutritional needs. The musician must care for his neighbors aesthetic needs, whether that be in the church or on the street.

Musical Discernment. If music is a craft fashioned by man, and not the source of inspired creativity, then it is fallen with the rest of creation. The task of musical discernment was unnecessary in the perfect creation, as work in the area of sound would have been done sinlessly and therefore “good.” De Mol has done an excellent job of articulating a Christian

view of our relationship to music in this fallen world and of the additional Christian task of discernment that the fall necessitates (1999).

De Mol identified three specific tasks that the Christian has regarding music: first, to make and use music excellently; second, to identify brokenness in musical activity due to the fall; and third, to use music as a service to our neighbor (1999). This threefold task is not only for the Christian musician, but for all Christians involved in music at any time. Only few will have performance music as a vocation, but music does enrich the lives of all students and requires their attention. All three tasks listed are of great importance to the Christian secondary school, but the second and third are of the greatest impact to the topic of discernment.

School music programs are the best equipped, given their primarily performance ensemble structure, to address the first task that De Mol outlined, that of making music excellently. How well schools teach musical performance from the mindset of Christian duty rather than a fun activity is a topic for a different study and will not be addressed here. Rather, what De Mol says about the Christian task of recognizing brokenness is the primary focus of musical discernment in school. Students make daily decisions about the music that fills their day and must do so in a God-glorifying manner.

Discernment requires acts of evaluating music, so from where do the standards come? Wolterstorff (1980) cited three areas for evaluating aesthetic excellence: unity, richness, and intensity. The unity of an object refers to its internal qualities and how they cohere to or complete one another. This measure is not a static set of rules, but rather the interconnectedness within the piece: "...unity can be secured in countless different ways. Symmetrically composed buildings can be unified aesthetically, but so too can

asymmetrically composed buildings” (p.164). Wolterstorff indicated that this aesthetic measure acts regardless of individual preference. One who does not prefer unity through symmetry to asymmetry still recognizes the unity, however secured, as an aesthetic merit.

Just as unity can be achieved in art in many different ways, so can richness. Richness refers to an internal variety and complexity in a work of art. Wolterstorff again acknowledged this to be a universal measure of excellence, as the methods by which richness can be achieved vary and may not suit all preferences, yet the richness that exists remains. However, an object that is both unified and internally rich may still be aesthetically bland, so Wolterstorff proposed “intensity” to be a third measure of aesthetic merit. The intensity of an object includes its relationship to concepts, feelings, and purposes outside of itself. Some common terms used to describe such relationships are an object’s “brightness” or “gracefulness,” concepts that may be quite fitting to describe the work, but are not inherent qualities of the work. This concept, referred to as “fittingness,” is rather abstract and perhaps impractical for wide use at the secondary level. It is similar to what Seerveld referred to as an object’s “allusiveness,” or the ways that an art object alludes to things outside of itself (2000).

De Mol (1999) built on the work of Wolterstorff in the evaluation of music specifically, and in a more immediately practical way. Her first area of evaluation includes the concepts of unity and richness in the form of “technique and craftsmanship.” Craftsmanship applies mainly to the act of composing a musical work, whereas technique is concerned mainly with the actual performance. Excellence in the crafting of music involves a knowledge of stylistic intricacies, historical context, use of historically informed compositional techniques, and if words are present, quality of poetry. Each of these areas

are rich for discernment, and are applicable to any style of music. Technique is also important, as a brilliantly composed piece of music may be poorly performed. Insuring that notes are played correctly and in tune, that instruments are of high quality, and that players are using efficient, healthy technique are all important in determining musical quality. In technique, performance is also greatly informed by stylistic and historical information. Not employing the principles of *musica ficta* in medieval music, performing a pop song with an operatic tone quality, and singing “The Star Spangled Banner” in a highly-embellished, slow fashion are all examples of poor technique given historical and stylistic context. A new avenue for use of excellent technique in music continues to be developed and explored, that of recording technique. Use of appropriate spaces, equipment, proximity, and ultimately mixing are all recording techniques that are may be considered in discerning the quality of recorded music.

With all of these technical excellences satisfied, De Mol indicated that an excellent piece of music must also be expressive. Expressiveness is difficult to define with language, because it is best expressed in music itself; a learned concept that grows through personal performance and observation of other performers. De Mol referred to it as “nuance, subtlety” (*On Musical Excellence*, p.160). She admitted the difficulty in defining the specifics of expressiveness shared by all aestheticians, but related them to Seerveld’s concept of “allusiveness” (2004). There is a caveat mentioned in the discussion of excellence in craftsmanship and expressiveness, that of the developmental level of the performers. It is true that there are degrees of excellence to be considered, especially for student musicians. Discernment is also a developed skill, so excellence in discerning must be seen in the context of development. However, it is appropriate to err on the side of caution when allowing

students to discern in any area. As is dangerous to allow students to define moral judgments that they are developmentally incapable of making, so it should be for aesthetic judgments.

The last umbrella evaluation category that De Mol identified is that of the “Integrity of musical materials, shape, and function,” which partners well with the previously illustrated concept of music being wedded to all of life. Music cannot be fully extracted from its purposes, so the uses of music are also an area for discernment. In this area, Wolterstorff was emphatic about evaluating art based on both how well it serves the purpose it was intended, and how satisfying and good it is to use for that purpose (1980). For the Christian, evaluating the uses of music is another task precipitated by the fall, as music that is technically excellent can be used thoughtlessly. Some events or situations may actually be harmed by the unnecessary presence of music, and in that instance, the music used does not enrich those hearing it. On this topic, De Mol said

I question whether every activity and place must be bathed with music of some sort.

We should be able to shop or wait for the dentist or be on hold on the phone without always being immersed in music. The continual presence of music works against both discernment and enjoyment, for we learn simply to tune it out. (*On Musical Excellence*, p165)

Summary. The views expressed here are a philosophy of music from a Reformed Christian perspective, viewing music as a human craft that can be evaluated based on what man knows about the created world of sound and its relationship to other dimensions of creation. For that reason, an appropriate attitude towards music includes four major concepts. First, a Christian attitude includes the recognition that there are objective qualities in music that can be measured and evaluated, whose truth is rooted in God and His desire for man to

work in creation artistically. This concept rejects a relativistic view of aesthetic quality and seeks standards for Christians as revealed in scripture and creation. Second, a Christian attitude recognizes that music is useful for many purposes beyond that of aesthetic contemplation, so critique of music is appropriate and necessary wherever music is used. Third, a Christian sees the musician not as a recipient of special inspiration, but as a vigorous student of their field. Like other disciplines, music is informed by centuries of exploration, tradition, and discovery, and must be seen as the worthy vocation of craftsmen. Neither is the musician seen as wasting his or her time on earth, as working in the area of sound is a worthy vocation. And fourth, discernment in music involves both the evaluation of music based on its aesthetic merits and its appropriateness to its purpose. All Christians are responsible for striving for excellence in musical activity.

These views are the foundation of Christian musical aesthetics, and worthy goals for schools to have for all of their graduates. The pervasiveness of music in the lives of students demands that Christian schools educate not just towards a general “appreciation” of music or seek that their students learn only to “enjoy” music. Students must graduate knowing how music impacts their lives and how to respond to it in a biblically-faithful way. The two common alternatives to teaching discernment, blind legalism and ignorance of relativism, are incompatible with a Christian worldview.

Discussion

A Model for Teaching Musical Discernment

The purpose of this study is to provide Christian secondary schools with practical ways to teach discernment to their students in the area of music. The goal of this discernment education is to prepare students to both know their task and respond to music in a biblically faithful way. Ideally, students graduating from a school with such a concerted effort in place will have the tools to critique, create, and choose music well. The end result of good discernment is not simply a list of specific rules for each student to memorize about choosing music, a pile of recordings that should be in any Christian's collection, a listing of radio stations or artists deemed "Christian," or any other simple litmus test for determining the Christianity of a piece of music. Rather, discernment is a dynamic exercise of finding quality through discussion with peers, careful listening, and the fitting of music to its appropriate function.

The proposed model is divided into three sections. The first discusses objectives regarding this topic that should be a part of a curriculum guide, based largely on the research into Christian aesthetics. Some of the objectives mentioned are concepts and attitudes that all students should hold concerning music, while others are specific skills and knowledge objectives that will aid the student in their discerning task. Section two briefly addresses who is most involved in discernment education; what students should have such training and what teachers would be most appropriate to do the training. Third, possible methods and class structures are discussed that apply to the music classrooms and the school as a whole. These methods are based largely on the research concerning taste formation and additional research about effective general music strategies.

The “What”

Musical discernment education must have specific goals. Hoping that students somehow absorb principles to guide their musical activity through their schooling without directed instruction is inadequate. The objectives drive the methods, so the philosophical underpinning must come first.

It is worth noting first that the Christian view of musical activity voiced previously, on which these objectives are based, is not shared by all Christian schools. Far easier paths lie on all sides of biblically faithful, critical discernment. Many times these paths are taken not because of serious theological differences, but because they are easier.

One possible path is an attitude of ignorance towards most musical activity. Some schools focus only on music used for worship, ignoring the fact that many other uses of music are good and valid. In this school, the ultimate realization of musical talent in a student would be the use of that talent in a worship service. Musical study for any other pursuit is seen as unimportant, and thus most of the musical world, deemed ‘secular,’ is shut out from Christian activity. This view allows the vast majority of musical activity to be relegated to non-Christians, alienating the Christian artist from their creational task. Some administrators may also see this “worship music only” policy as a rubber stamp of Christianity on the school, as if Christian words are all that matter (Topp, 1976).

Another message that students may get from schools is that of musical modesty. The school environment is sanitized of any lyrics or topics that would be too controversial or perhaps offensive to anyone. This encourages students to have musical tastes that are only relative to their environment. The makeup of the present company determines the

appropriateness of music, and becomes a brisk path towards relativism. Both this and the previous paths are common in Christian circles and are flawed approaches to music. Neither of them will use the musical attributes of music to evaluate its quality. Rather, both approaches rely almost wholly on words in music to determine any piece's appropriateness. What then becomes of music without words? Would the typical Christian secondary student cite primarily musical concepts to answer the question "What is Christian music?"

Some have even proposed methods for examining the Christianity of instrumental music in theological rather than musical terms. Alan Ives (1993) has a ministry devoted to "Christian" music and is a frequent speaker on the issue. He analyzes music chiefly on its associations, claiming that the devil is against whatever God is for, therefore syncopation is evil, because many hymns have on-the-beat, marching rhythms. Similarly, he claims that minor chords should be avoided by Christians in great quantity due to their association with sadness. Nowhere in scripture did God ordain specific rhythms, chords, or other musical elements. In contrast, Karen De Mol (1999) remarked "It is important to note that in this discussion of evaluating the music itself, we have not used any terminology about "Christian music," but rather discussed the hallmarks of quality." (p.51) Excellence is the goal for Christian music making, as with all human activity. Christian music does not fit into a manmade genre; it is a way of living in the world of sound.

Due to the great interrelatedness of the actions of performing and discerning music, many curricular objectives that already typically exist are helpful for teaching musical discernment. A greater amount of musical training was one of the most powerful forces shaping a student's musical taste. However, some objectives must be stated and followed through that specifically target discernment skills. Some secular sources even hint at

objectivity and express a desire for students to discern. The National Standards for Arts Education (Consortium for National Arts Education Associations, 1994) recognize nine curricular goals for students throughout their education. The first five are related to performance, six and seven with music evaluation, and the final two with the relationship of music to other arts and culture. Standards six and seven aim for secondary students to be accomplished in their descriptive abilities regarding music, and to be fine evaluators of musical quality. State education associations have based their curricula on these standards, and they are widely held as learning goals for all students. The state of Iowa outlined “Listening/Critical Reasoning Development” as a specific area of musical development, desiring that the student learn to “listen to music with objectivity and meaning.” (Iowa Department of Education, 1997, p.10) Likewise, in discussing musical values development, the Iowa Department of Education uses phrases such as ‘tolerance for diverse musical styles,’ ‘seeks more music,’ and ‘express thoughts about music.’ Again, these are hints at teaching musical discernment in secular schooling.

Sadly, the secular curricular guidance stopped short of saying what they wanted the students to value specifically, even though they mention some objective terms in their stated goals. From a distinctly Christian standpoint, Harro Van Brummelen (2002) offered three primary goals for Christian music education, putting performance matters after those of philosophical understanding:

In the curriculum, the arts have at least three goals. First, they make students critically aware of the role of aesthetics in society, both past and present. Second, they help students enjoy and appreciate aesthetic products through experience and

performance. Third, they unfold students' aesthetic potential through composing works of art. (p.157)

By saying "at least," Van Brummelen indicated that more goals than those three were certainly valid pursuits. Discernment skills and an understanding of art's function fit well into Van Brummelen's first goal of recognizing the relationship of music to life.

Dale Topp (1976) said that a Christian music program is not complete without teaching specific values, knowledge, and skills to music students. In his discussion of appropriate musical values in choosing music he refers to the difficulty schools have with proclaiming specific values, saying, "A desire for simple answers to Christian living in music reveals an unwillingness to pray for guidance....Christian schools must be willing to take on the more difficult questions regarding music, showing what Christ has to say about every area." (p.149) Students and schools should struggle with the issue of musical discernment. Regarding musical knowledge and skills, Topp said that students must be aware of both positive and negative influences on their musical preferences, and that listening skills can and should be developed in an atmosphere of fun (1976).

Overall, it is clear that a Christian school must adopt specific curricular objectives geared towards musical discernment that provide clear guidance for appropriate musical attitudes, while providing them with the musical skills that will aid them in that task. Adapting Fennema's model for mapping curriculum (Lecture, Dordt College, 25 July 2006), the proposed curriculum aims proceed from a curricular goal to essential questions, which lead to essential concepts and skills. Essential questions are open-ended, thought provoking inquiries that any student needs to explore in their schooling. The concepts are those that answer essential questions in a unique way. Differing worldviews lead to different concepts,

so these are based largely on the review of a Christian view of music. Essential skills are those necessary for the students to continually answer the essential questions throughout their lives.

Curricular Goal: The students will learn to discern music and musical activity that is biblically faithful from unfaithful.

Essential Questions:

- What is biblically faithful music and how is it evaluated?
- How is music being used faithfully and unfaithfully in the world today?
- What is the role of the Christian musician in the world?
- What are appropriate purposes for music?
- What is an appropriate relationship between music and worship?

Essential Concepts: The students will understand that

- God values music and has opinions about it; therefore it can be evaluated objectively, with value independent of the listener's opinions.
- Discernment is necessary for music in its many embedded places in life, not only for music that was intended for aesthetic contemplation. This is a task not only for the professional musician, but also every Christian who encounters music.
- Music is a human craft rather than divine revelation, so the musician's work is as in need of redemption as the rest of creation.
- Music can and should be discerned for its musical quality, not only its relationships and associations. Biblically faithful music is excellent musically.

Essential Skills: The students will be able to

- Discuss a Christian worldview about musical activity

- Listen to music critically in many genres and historical periods.
- Identify musical structures and elements, and analyze how they compare to excellent musical examples and practices.
- Compose music with basic harmonies, melodies, and standard notation
- Evaluate music based on its craftsmanship, expressiveness, and relationship to its form and function.
- Apply concepts of musical excellence to their personal performance and selection of music.

All of these concepts and skills are valuable towards education in musical discernment.

Secondary students who become competent in all of the areas will be well equipped to discern musical excellence. Next, the discussion turns to who should be most involved in this discernment education.

The “Who”

Who should be taught musical discernment? Who should be involved in teaching it? With all that has been said about the relationship of music to a Christian’s life, it is difficult to ignore the fact that discernment education is valuable to all students, not just those uniquely gifted or with a special interest in music. For the music teacher, a new way of teaching music may be necessary if these concepts and skills will be adequately addressed.

While many secondary schools require at least some study in the fine arts, few have a specific requirement for musical study. However, every student is daily involved in music, with or without guidance from the school. The skills involved in discerning musical quality and activity are in primarily two sections, those that are specific musical skills and those that are more philosophical and moral. The relativism and pragmatism that dominates society

warp the philosophical and moral concepts above into vague desires of wanting students to ‘love’ or ‘appreciate’ music with little message about what they should love or appreciate about music (Cutietta, 1992). If a student’s personal opinion about music, even at the secondary level, is the ultimate determiner of quality, then learning about a careful process of evaluation is of little value to that student. This is reflected in the fact that as schools have recently focused more on experiences that muster excitement about music in general (i.e. ensembles, competitions, show groups) while enrollment in general music courses, where careful discrimination can more easily be studied, has dropped to less than two percent at the secondary level (Reimer, 1989). This only adds to the view of music as a specialized, rather than core, subject that is reserved for only specially gifted students. Music being perceived as a more specialized, exclusive subject has already been documented as a significant reason that students give for not continuing to study music (Hargreaves, Purves, Welch & Marshall, 2007). Topp (1976) warned against this specialization trend, saying that while music departments no longer needed outside course benefits to justify their existence, ignoring the interrelatedness of music to all other subjects has hurt the idea that music is worthy for all students to study. Music partners with many other aspects of life, so it is worth studying those relationships with all students rather than only some.

Runfola and Rutkowski (1992) cite disunity in curricular structure as one of the major problems with general music. Curricular structures are guided by purpose and vision, so perhaps the problem is in the influence of relativism. If the ‘what’ about musical activity is distilled down to the vague notion of ‘appreciation’ with no truth claims about the end result, disunity will certainly exist. Christian schools are unique in their ability to claim truth in

musical activity, and are therefore far more capable of teaching music's many wonderful uses within the Christian life.

Thus, no student should be exempt from the study of musical discernment. All Christian school students develop musical identities, and the increasing opportunity for individuality in their musical experiences makes it even more important that they receive guidance in this area. It is imperative that young Christians know their responsibility in an area with which they have so much contact, so no student should be exempt from an education in musical discernment. Many of the skills necessary for discernment, such as those relating to the basics of melody and harmony, are already studied through performance ensembles. However, specific skills and concepts related to discernment, like those listed previously, are difficult to address in that class structure and encourage involvement in a secondary general music course. Furthermore, many students are not required to take either such course, and hence receive little if any guidance in discernment. This is an unacceptable condition in a Christian school, so any successful discernment education program must be part of the required course of study.

Who else is involved in discernment education? Trained music teachers should be the primary teachers responsible for educating musical discernment, as most musical evaluation is musical in nature. Evaluation of poetry related to music, as in song texts, is best suited to a literature teacher. Moral messages in song texts are best analyzed by a theology teacher, and implications of music related to cultures and time periods may be best in the hands of a history teacher. However, the music teacher is the primary cultivator of the musical philosophy of the school, and should remain so in discernment education. At the same time, studying discernment is not done in a box. A topic such as music is

immeasurably rich with associations to all other subjects, so this quality should be exploited when teaching music in any focus (Topp, 1976).

While the music teacher is primary, other teachers and the school at large are also deeply involved in the modeling of excellent musical discernment to students. The school must project a unified vision for desiring biblical faithfulness in all music performed, heard, and used in the school. This involves selecting appropriate music as it partners with school activities from week to week. It also requires a modeling of appropriate musical attitude in the classroom by all other teachers. Most importantly, the school's philosophy about musical discernment is no more corporately displayed than in its use in chapel assemblies. Similarly, a Christian school's attitude about the place of music in life is greatly reflected in structures such as class schedules and graduation requirements. A program for educating students in musical discernment cannot succeed without the efforts and unified vision of the entire school. In many schools, the changes proposed in the following section of this study would involve a radical shift in thinking for many students, parents, and teachers. A great deal of training in musical discernment is philosophical, so a school must agree and act on that philosophy for the training to be effective.

The "How"

As with many educational issues, there are no quick fixes, perfect methods that work every time, or model schools that solve the problem perfectly. Even so, research suggests that schools hold powerful tools for influencing students' perception of music and musical activity, and the methods suggested must exploit every advantage.

There are both philosophical understandings and musical skills that are required for Christian discernment, as outlined previously. To review, research suggests that musical

training, familiarity with musical styles and specific pieces, good modeling by authority figures, and careful selection of music in the classroom are the four areas schools control that can most greatly affect a student's attitudes towards music, both specifically and generally.

A music teacher has opportunity to use all four ways on a daily basis, so there are suggestions specific to the music classroom. For the entire school, modeling is the most potent, as faculty and the school model musical preferences and choices each day, so there are more suggestions for the school at large.

Implications for the Music Classroom

As mentioned previously, the music classroom is where the greatest amount of discernment education does and should take place. Performance ensembles dominate the class offerings of secondary music programs, so it is valuable to first analyze how these courses can be used most effectively for discernment education, and for what uses they are deficient. While the ensembles do possess some great influence, also included in this proposal is the establishment of a required general music course in Christian high schools, which are better suited to teaching the philosophical understandings and analytical skills.

Studying music without making any is illogical and ineffective, so performance ensembles at the secondary level should never cease to exist. They are excellent avenues for training in the elements of music, history, and for making expressive performance decisions. However, teaching all the skills necessary for discernment would require a radical restructuring of class time. Many ensemble classes are run as rehearsals only, with little if any time spent introducing and reinforcing concepts specifically. This is very different than the general music so commonly found in elementary school, where elements and concepts are presented more methodically. Much of this basic musical training is understood as

“background knowledge” by the time students enter high school, so time is spent instead in pursuit of excellent music making, hence more rehearsal. The prevalence of contest and rating systems for such ensembles only encourages more efficient rehearsal and less time spent on anything else. Even for ensembles that do not compete, there is always the pressure of public performance. Overall, the advantages of a school ensemble in training for discernment are that they give students ample opportunity to perform and work with music. They certainly receive more musical training and gain familiarity with styles and specific pieces than students not in the ensembles. The rehearsal process also gives students the ability to listen to a piece many times and gain appreciation through familiarity. The ensemble director already is active in choosing music carefully, and models musical preference by his or her concert programming. All this about an ensemble can inspire students to value excellent music in their lives and also value personal musical performance beyond school.

But what about discernment specifically? An ensemble does have sway over the four major areas of influence over taste, but the structure of a rehearsal and the pressure of performance also lend disadvantages. Students do spend a great deal of time listening to music in a rehearsal, but are they encouraged to listen specifically to large structures, or critique melodies and orchestration choices of the composers? Personal composition is also not frequently addressed, and many musical decisions still come down to the director alone. An ensemble also produces music that, though excellent, is generally of a far different style than students encounter each day, so its relationship to the “real world” is tenuous.

Specific changes can be made in the ensemble structure that can make the class more effective for teaching discernment. First, directors should be encouraged to spend more time

specifically addressing excellence in the pieces being rehearsed. More rehearsal time spent discussing with students the merits of pieces is a prime opportunity for the teacher to model a preference for excellence. Also, more activities in personal composition introduced into the rehearsal process have been shown to be quite effective, with similar performance results for ensembles that did and did not spend half of their time on composition tasks (Riley, 2006). Student composition is an excellent way to address both musical elements and critical evaluation of the craftsmanship of music. Lastly, a change in teaching style that treats the ensemble as byproduct rather than ultimate goal of musical study can promote a classroom environment with more critical thinking about music, as Nola Franklin's extremely successful approach that teaches choir as "general music with a choral emphasis" (Silvey, 2005, p104). Still, the performance ensemble is not the ideal environment in which to develop the philosophical understandings and evaluative skills necessary. Some students also find the requirement of public performance more discouraging than inspiring, so a different environment for musical study is important.

The argument begs for an outlet for aesthetic instruction outside of the performance ensemble specifically directed towards musical discernment. A school that embraces musical relativism does not have nearly the same pull, as the musical taste it desires is not specific at all, only that students value the subject area in a general way. A required secondary general music course could certainly provide the context for discernment training, and gives greater opportunity for musical instruction to interact with other subjects.

Secondary General Music in the Christian School. Due to the contrast between Christian philosophy and those that guide most secular schools, the purpose and shape of a general music curriculum can differ greatly for each. Speaking from the secular perspective,

Runfola and Rutkowski (1992) offer “the ultimate goal of music education: appreciation of music, including a desire for continued participation in music.” (General Music Curriculum, p.697). This statement affirms the overarching relativism in taste, as its ultimate goal for the student is vague, non-specific interest. The authors lamented the eclecticism and lack of unity in general music curricula, which is not a surprising classroom manifestation of that same relativism. Beginning with truth, the Christian school has a clearer responsibility and can more easily craft general music with an eye toward the daily task of discernment.

The listed essential concepts and skills for discernment require both the establishment of a sound philosophical foundation and a great deal of listening to music while wrestling with the issue of its quality. Acting Christianly in the area of music requires daily discernment, so a secondary general music education should include ample opportunity to listen to and discuss music with the guidance of a Christian music teacher. This discussion and evaluation of music, as noted previously, requires the interaction of a number of different skills and understandings, so the general music course should introduce or reinforce all of them. The specifics of the curriculum for this course can be derived directly from the concepts and skills listed before, and suggest three main topics: music theory, intuitive listening, and music philosophy. The integral nature of life makes any of these three topics difficult to separate from each other. Study in music theory specifically is valuable, but makes little sense without listening, and all knowledge in those two areas is of little value without a philosophical understanding of Christian purpose and responsibility. It is best then, that the integrality also be reflected in the course structure.

Music theory is often ignored specifically in the secondary ensemble as the knowledge is already assumed in the students. General music at the elementary level

includes study of notation, scales and keys, rhythms, and other elemental topics. There is no reason why these skills should not be furthered at the secondary level. Once students understand the basics in musical elements and notation, more complex tasks are possible. One of the dangers of music theory study is the fact that it can be presented so theoretically, with little application to real-world situations. This is often a tempting way to present music theory at the secondary level given the typical teacher-driven structure of classes. A required general music course would need to approach music theory more practically, giving more opportunity for students to be responsible for the selection of materials. It is useful to remember that by the time students reach secondary school they are already highly experienced listeners, so much of what they lack are the tools to describe and represent what they hear (Dunn, 2006; Cuddy & Upitis, 1992). Given that, and the desire for music theory study to relate to daily life, having students describe the melodic and harmonic elements of music they hear every day can be some of the most useful types of tasks for students to complete. Transcribing the melodies and basic structure of a piece of music for many students would require additional study of music theory than they received in elementary school, but with those skills in hand, they are much more able to discern the quality of new pieces they encounter. Personal composition is an activity that especially encourages deep understanding of a host of musical concepts and lays the foundation for critique of other works.

Study in music theory should be closely related to and included with a great deal of listening. Students interact with music primarily through listening, so critical listening is an imperative discernment skill. A trite melody or harmony, poor connections between text and music, or thoughtless uses of music in a certain situation are all things that secondary

students should be able to identify in their daily lives. Robert Dunn (2006) gives a number of suggestions to the general music teacher about how to best encourage intuitive listening skills. His first suggestion is to simply do more of it, and make that listening a more thoughtful activity. Hearing and listening are not equivalent activities, and students are not often asked to use their ears as attentively as is necessary to carefully analyze music. Again, it is good that the same excerpts be listened to repeatedly with different areas of focus. Excellent music is rich with opportunity for analysis, so truly listening to a piece is not an activity that can be completed on one hearing alone. The music teacher is most responsible for the careful selection of listening examples, being sure that the complexity matches the present listening skill level of the students in the classroom. When listening, it is also wise to have students approach music with little bias, as snap judgments of preference can hurt appreciation of quality music (Topp, 1976). Experience and practice in discernment are the most important factors of discernment education, and that experience must be applicable to daily life. A successful program, then, includes time spent having students selecting and critiquing music from all facets of life, using a vast array of styles and genres. Familiarity with the many musical offerings throughout history will both allow students the tools to examine music in its context, and broaden their taste to include music that they would otherwise pass over. Through classroom experience students should be able to identify the most inventive artists and quality musicians in many genres, and teacher-guided practice in intuitive listening is one of the most effective ways of teaching that skill. Dunn also mentions that holistic listening can be encouraged in the performance ensemble as well, with students recording and critiquing their own musical performance. A wealth of experience in the discernment skill is key.

All of the study outlined above is excellent for a general music course aimed at discernment, but none of it is worthwhile without providing students with the philosophical underpinning that guides their discernment. Reading and discussing of Christian music philosophy should be central to any Christian general music curriculum. Again, much of this is an issue of instructional time and class format. Performance ensembles do not offer the most conducive environment for philosophical discussion, so a general music classroom is preferred. Through this vein of the curriculum, students should learn first that music can and should be evaluated based on its quality. Both De Mol (2004) and Seerveld (1999) sternly reject the idea of Christians being overly cautious about critiquing the artistry of other Christians. Students must have opportunity in the class to critique each other in love. “What’s needed is forthright, edifying artistic critique of the concrete imaginative offerings you have brought into the circle of colleagues for that very testing.” (Seerveld, *Creativity*, p5). Students should be taught not to fear artistic critique, but rather welcome it. At the same time, they should come to understand that discernment is necessary everywhere. Musical evaluation does not stop at the door of the concert hall, just as criticism of fallacious theology does not only take place inside a sanctuary on Sunday. Speaking about music not intended for contemplation, Hoffer (1992) suggested that students may need to be given different viewpoints with which to consider music, one for listening and one for absorbing. To do so would amount to a evaluative “pass” for genres deemed to be “just for fun” and would allow Christian students to shirk their responsibility. The more valuable discussion to address in general music discussions is that of how music matches its function. Included in such study should be practical experiences for students in the activity of selecting music to partner with various facets of life, such as planning music for church services or school

functions. It is mainly in this area that the discernment education supercedes the general music classroom and applies to the school as a whole.

Assessment. Preferences and attitudes are difficult things for researchers to quantify, and discernment curriculum would need to do that as well. Testing to see how well students seek God-glorifying excellence in music and manifest their Christian philosophy about music becomes a difficult task. Cutietta (1992) indicates that attitudes are generally measured in research three ways: through verbal response, behavioral response, and to a lesser extent, physiological response. In all, behavioral responses are far more effective predictors of future behavior than are verbal responses. It is through observing the choices that students make in their listening habits, event planning, course selection, and other daily musical tasks that the school can most effectively measure student achievement in discernment education. It is of course still important that students be able to verbalize their attitudes and preferences, but the ultimate desire of the school is that those statements and analyses lead to excellent choices.

The opportunity for authentic assessment tasks in this type of curriculum is great. General music courses' lack of real-world application has marginalized the subject altogether, so it would be wise to craft assessments that are real and useful. Music teachers should avoid discernment assessments that are too simple or akin to "busywork," and should instead attempt to align assessment tools that will directly apply to the types of decisions students already make daily. Projects that force students to make real musical decisions give great opportunity for students to exhibit their preference for excellence and appropriateness, such as planning church services, programming concerts, and composing. Through class discussion and critique of such choices, students would have the opportunity to hone their

discernment skills and share choices with others. The more competent the students become in their discernment, the more complex and open-ended their assessment can be. One aspect of discernment is that correct and incorrect responses are not as static. A task that involves musical choices can have more than one equally good answer if both are based on sound Christian and musical principles.

Implications for the School at Large

The school as a whole is a significant model of musical discernment for the student. Through its policies concerning music and treatment of music in other classrooms and school events, the school shows students its true philosophy about the place of music in the Christian life. While most of the suggestions regarding taste formation fall to the music teacher, appropriate modeling of musical choices by authority figures is a strong influence. The musical philosophy and discernment practices of the school must be a shared voice, and has implications for other teachers, school administrators, music teacher hiring policies, and teacher education programs.

First, other teachers must promote a model of musical discernment that is reflective of the discernment taught in the music program. Just as teachers in subjects other than English should demand student papers free of grammatical errors, non-music teachers should demand that music be used appropriately in their classrooms. When students use music in partnership with other classroom activities, it should be scrutinized along with other elements. How well music that has been partnered with a presentation matches its purpose should be a valid area for critique. Likewise, when teachers appropriately use music in their teaching, they should be sure that it is being used thoughtfully and they are modeling good discernment. As many students have not been guided specifically in discernment, so many teachers may not have

been. It may be necessary for music teachers to offer workshops or interest sessions that address good musical discernment in the classroom, or in some other way formally communicate how other teachers can best support their discernment education. In a recent lecture, Dr. John Mark Reynolds (lecture, ACSI Alaska convention, September 27, 2007), of the Torrey Honors Institute and Biola University lamented the fact that arts teachers are often not allowed to function as the aesthetic experts in their schools. Schools hire architects to design their buildings and builders to watch over their construction, then all too often fill those buildings with art chosen by lay people and administrators. Teachers that need help making musical decisions should feel free to seek out the advice of a fine aesthete that is in the building, so that their musical choices are the best possible models for the students. In word and action, teachers throughout the school should do their best to support the mission of the music educator, purging the ideas of relativism and elitism that so often leave music curriculum in the music classroom alone.

The school administration has three primary outlets for modeling an appropriate attitude towards music and musical discernment. The first is in their policies toward music as a curricular area, where the administration can show how a sound Christian philosophy is reflected in class offerings and course requirements. The argument for a required general music course has been voiced previously, and administrative support for such a course and its discernment education would show students and parents that the school is interested in educating for musical discernment. If such a course is not immediately possible to implement, or a music teacher is uninterested in or incapable of teaching it, the administration can encourage the music teacher to find and implement practices that address musical discernment within the current structure. Secondly, administrators can take care to

craft policies regarding the musical choices students exhibit at school that are reflective of a Christian philosophy toward music. As stated before, this is a difficult issue and can easily turn towards rules of a legalistic “only Christian music” sort. The growing presence of recorded music and the portability of personal music players makes it difficult for school staff to monitor the listening choices of students, but perhaps the greater challenge is the reclusive individuality that they allow. It would be wise for administrators to create policies that encourage communal, thoughtful uses of music that view the student as discerner rather than merely consumer.

Also at issue is the school’s specific uses of music. Administrators must be sure that music is chosen for school functions, such as chapel gatherings and sporting events, that models good discernment for the school. Again, the music teacher can and should be consulted if there are any questions of appropriateness or suitability. In all situations, the administration should model a preference for excellence in music, and celebrate its successes. When a music ensemble is tasked for participation in a school function, it is important to be sure that such an event is appropriate for a school ensemble performance, and that an appropriate Christian value for music is exhibited throughout the experience. For example, having an ensemble that performs primarily concert music perform in a situation that places their music in the “background” of a meal is a poor model of joining appropriate music with appropriate function. At the same time, such a task is valid for school musicians, as music is not meant only for the concert hall. Providing and selecting background music is something they will appropriately do throughout their lives. Music partners well with meals and celebrations for the purpose of creating moods. Assigning this task to an ensemble who

rehearses music more appropriate to background use (such as a chamber or jazz ensemble) would be reasonable.

A final application is necessary regarding the education and selection of Christian music educators. Administrators and school board members can aid discernment education by assuring that the teachers they hire are equipped to meet the new challenges facing students in the area of music. Those who hire music teachers should be sure that their music educator(s) be the aesthetic experts that the school needs. They should be able to voice an integral, Christian view of musical activity and prove their discernment in their own actions. In order to teach discernment in an applicable way, music teachers must not be ignorant of recent trends in music and be able to discuss the issue of Christian task with students, parents, and faculty. Christian teacher education programs have a complementary task, to be sure that the music educators they graduate are not only proficient musicians and directors, but also expert listeners and Christian music philosophers who can teach towards God-glorifying discernment in music. Undergraduate students focused on excellence in their conducting patterns should be just as rigorous in their analytical listening skills, as they will be the primary models of musical discernment for their students and their school.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Musical discernment education of the kind described here would only apply to the curricula of distinctly Christian schools. The source of truth in musical evaluation recognized here is God, so any public schools would have trouble discussing musical quality from that standpoint. However, it has been emphasized here that music can and should be evaluated for its musical qualities, so the topic of excellence and discernment can be addressed, though incompletely, in the context of a public school. The philosophical

objectives within the curricular model would need to be modified or in some cases removed, but many of the skill objectives would be appropriate in either a Christian or secular context. The prevailing philosophy of relativism is the largest hindrance to effective discernment education in all schools, because without a claim of truth or standard that extends beyond the individual, all musical choices must be viewed as equally valid. Until music teachers can claim a specific standard, implementing such a curriculum is useless. Christian school teachers have a much easier task in this regard.

Lack of research on the topic of discernment education is a significant limitation. Much of what is available is only tangentially related to teaching musical discernment, and comes from psychological study rather than educational. The most significant study into musical attitudes also appears to be older, and new studies often build on older models. Thirty years ago, students interacted with music very differently than they do today, so perhaps a reexamination of preexisting study models is necessary to make new research into musical attitudes more valid in the twenty-first century. At the level of Christian schooling, the absence of literature is even more severe. It would be valuable to research various Christian school programs that are already doing the task of discernment education well, and through qualitative studies provide other schools with proven methods. Being a relatively uncharted area for research, discernment education could be a marvelous opportunity for Christian educators to lead the way, as they are not hindered in the same way as secular researchers who lack a shared philosophy of musical excellence.

Lastly, man's relationship to music continues to change rapidly and will provide educators with more avenues to explore with students in years to come that are beyond the knowledge of this paper. If this same document was written only a few decades ago, the

thought of extensive collections of music stored in ultra-portable devices would not have played into the suggestions. Nor would it have been as easy to suggest that teachers present students with many and different recordings for contemplation, as they would not have been as easily accessible. Ten years from now, this culture will relate to music differently still, and discernment education will be even more important. It is safe to assume that the portability and ease of duplication of music will only increase with time, at the same time students' interaction with genuine musical artifacts will decrease. Discernment education, then, must not be static, and as new issues present themselves, so must the curriculum adapt to deal with those issues. Thankfully for Christian educators, there is one portion of the curriculum that does not change, and that is the philosophical underpinning provided by God in both the creation and His Word.

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